

Kyle Hemmings

**Why Dr. Phil Didn't Want Me
on His Show**

I was a latchkey child
with borrowed personality.

After I gave it back,
I had no personality.

I was so ugly my mother
dreamed of sad alligators on leashes.

The psychiatrist told my dad that
"his mud drawings are abstracts

with meanings that
cannot be extracted."

Girls mistook me for scrap metal
or bad leakage on a rainy day.

I was hoping to become
a sailboat in their beds.

When I did grow up, I became
the dirty water in their basements.

She's a Sucker for Me

If you admit
your love for me
is as deep
as the dreams
of an ocean-boat
blue whale
that swims close to surface,
would you pluck out
your olivine eyes,
would you mute
your own
seashell-thin
voice?

& I would keep
untying your shoelaces
& you would keep
falling
getting up
& falling
falling
because you still
can't see.

After Prison

You return
to the club,
named *Tin-foil Lilies*.

Some
might consider you
a celebrity.

After all, you
were caught
selling bad dope
to a gay porn star.
Nobody loved
the porn star,
not even his wife.

At open mike,
a cabaret performer
jokes about so many
bones buried beneath
the basement.
Then he belts out
a raspy rendition of
Eartha Kitt's
"Where Is My Man?"

Most of the faces
here are new.
You feel older
than everyone.
The bartender pretends
that he can't see you
or he disappears downstairs
claiming the seltzer is out.

Not even the aging
drag queen,
asleep at the end
of the bar,
would want you
if she awakes.

Ingratitude

I built you
from the wood
of box trees,
of figs leaning
toward the night.
Threw in
some bay leaf
& star anise
for good measure

I gave you
the soul
of my wife,
boxed
in red-brown
acacia.
My wife
who could never
flip an egg
without
breaking it.
She was crushed
by the sky.

I said
breathe.

You rose
dreamy-eyed,
walked away,
& never bothered
to thank me.

A Girl Named China Is Your Brittle Future

She was taking care of her terminally ill mom and a set of potted silk plants. Her words were crazy trains rushing past me, over me. We spoke between classes or when the bus broke down or under trees hiding fat squirrels with eyes that knew us. Weeks passed like slow flames. Her mother was sleeping more, talking less. I came over twice a week, brought several shades of neediness. We did it quietly in her room while her mother remained dreamless with her mouth open. I felt dizzy in that house, un-knowing myself or my motives, made stupid jokes about growing onions upside down or how during sex, our bodies made sucking noises. China didn't laugh. Her dark eyes remained frozen, unreadable. Evenings became strained, more humid. I wondered what it would be like to plant myself in her shoes. Which way would I grow? Her mother's body had become a mysterious void.

China jumped at the beep of a feeding pump. She was becoming more obtuse, saying that she didn't believe in the word "decompose" or "dead". She said bodies evaporate the way liquids do in our experiments for Mr. Hennessey's Physical Science labs. I suspected she had a crush on him because ugly men to her were a challenge. They needed merciful weeding and make-over. They needed a patient gardener, sensitive to root need. When her mother finally evaporated, China disappeared for weeks, her rooms closed for sex. My nose itched. I gave wrong answers in Hennessey's class. My mother bought powdered milk because she believed it was healthier. When China did return from whatever state of matter or not-matter, she was mute. My thumbs hurt from planting vegetables.

Time Un-Warped

She wasn't the kind
of girl to plant
tiny daggers
under the sofa,
dead ants
in the pants
of the boy
whose eyes
were perfect pools
of her horizontally
bloated
childhood.

When she did snap
some twenty years
later
there was nothing to lift
but glass.

The Queen of Late Nite

She was on
Jimmy Kimmel
two weeks
before she died.
The great star
of 60s soap opera,
the TV mother
of an 80s outcast.
The audience
[was?]
[must have been?}
instructed
to applaud
when she joked
about her "monstrous
blond wig."
There was a silence.

I reached for
more hot sauce
Kimmel at a loss
for words..
The audience--
I wanted to read
their faces

Mute Replica Beauty

I don't suppose
that trite expression
"you die a little
each day,"
will turn any tulip heads
in grandmother's forgotten
garden bed.

And although
her plastic flowers
by the west window
lean sickly,
they remain healthy.